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A Hole in the Wall

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A Hole in the Wall

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Sculpture + Extended Media at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by
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Bachelor of Fine Arts, Tyler School of Art, 2007

Director: Ester Partegàs, Assistant Professor, Sculpture +Extended Media

Virginia Commonwealth University Richmond, VA
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ABSTRACT

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By Carl Marin, MFA

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A collection of life experiences, and inter-monologues that attempt to shed light on my artistic process.

A Hole in the Wall

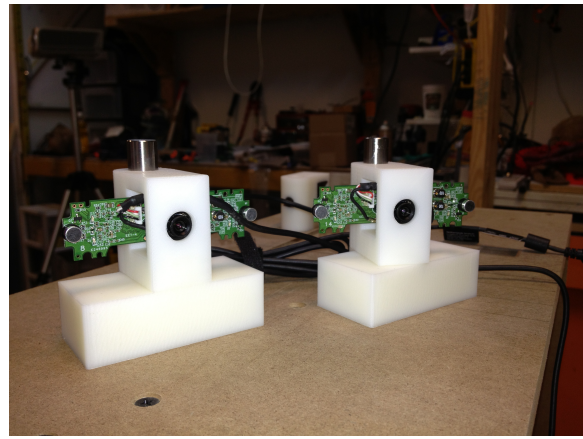
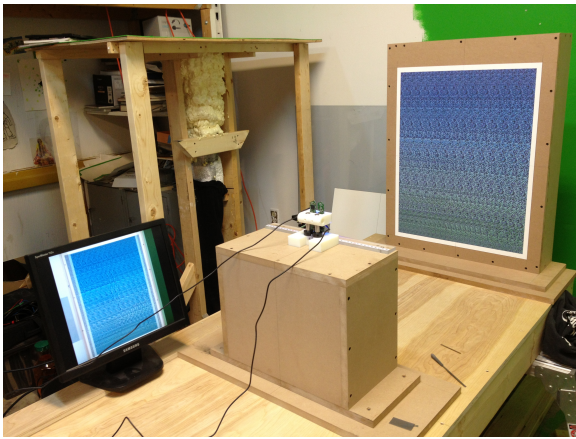
Often I feel like my bedroom is a prison I wake up in, a cell that I can't find the door to exit out of. It closes me off from the outside world just enough that I feel trapped or locked in. I have often thought it would be good to have a hole in the wall next to my bed so that I could reach through and feel the air outside. I know that is what windows are for but this would be different. I like the idea of a specific opening to help me get outside of my head. My bedroom is a projection of me. It holds all my belongings and all the things I no longer want but can't manage to throw away, all these reminders of my past. That is why it is better to wake up somewhere else, or with someone else, who can distract me from myself, when I wake up in the morning. Someone who can put things into focus for me and help me get out the front door; the biggest step. Once I emerge out the front door and feel the air outside, everything is ok.

Dressing like Marilyn Manson



I remember when I first became very conscious of my appearance. It was in middle school and I had decided that I wanted to dress like Marilyn Manson, a musician who I didn't know much about, but who definitely got my attention. What I find most interesting about this period in my life was how bipolar I was with my new look. One day I would come to school all done up, with blue spiked hair, chains around my neck, and black nail polish, and the next day I would come in dressed so normal that I would vanish into the background. These “normal days” were the mornings I woke up late, felt self-conscious, or was conflicted by how impractical my new style was. If I wanted to ride a bike or throw a Frisbee I had to go home and change.

Some days I feel my outer appearance should not impair my ability to function. And other days I feel no shame in attending to my outer appearance in order to function. I find that I am always conflicted about what I feel is practical or impractical. I always seem to gravitate more toward the impractical. This indecisive nature of mine forces me to create structures within my art that will make decisions for me.



There are two categories of thought I use to make decisions within my work. One category is devoted to logical or practical decisions. These are decisions that answer themselves, and are connected to how I engineer a project. For example in a recent work of mine I wanted to create a camera capable of seeing a stereoscopic image. This became an engineering problem, and so I was focused on the logistics of making a tool. My other category is devoted to illogical or impractical decisions. It is these decisions that create the content of my work, because here I don't have to listen to logic. This is where I can make the decision to make a camera that sees a stereoscopic image, or decide that I will dress like Marilyn Manson.

Often the surface treatment of my work is what I feel most indecisive about. This is because I find it hard to consider the exterior appearance of my work. I am more concerned with the concept. For example in my last show I knew that I wanted to have carpet in the room because it would match the texture of my stereoscopic images. I also wanted something to literally hold everything together and to connect everything, viewer with artwork. But I couldn't decide how the carpet should look in the room. I knew I didn't want the whole room to be covered in one type of carpet, so instead I collected a large amount of carpet remnants. When I was deciding how to put these together I tried to be true to what they were and eliminate an element of design. I wanted it to feel like remnants and for it to be obviously constructed for that show.



Welding Together Ideas

Art gives me the freedom to not always make logical decisions. What I mean by this is that my decisions can be frivolous, not completely functional and not completely efficient. I find the push and pull between the functional and unnecessary both intriguing and difficult.

An important influence in my life that affects my art practice, and my concept of what is practical or not, was the four years I worked as a bicycle frame builder. I felt a lot of responsibility when I worked there because anyone that purchased a bicycle from us was putting his or her life in our hands. They were trusting that we were capable of making a product that they could ride 30 mph down the street. But everyone I worked with was at a different stage of learning. I didn't come in as a welder; I became a welder there. I started at the bottom putting pedals and handlebars on bikes before they went to the customer. Then I moved up to operating a torch to braze water bottle bosses and cable guides onto frames. Next I was welding less expensive frames that were already tacked together. In the process of learning I would make many mistakes and I was always conscious of how I was making these mistakes on someone's "one of a kind" bicycle. One time a bicycle I had worked on was sent to the painter before I had gotten the chance to sand away my "leArNing" mistakes. It came back with an immaculate paint job that highlighted all these drips of metal. Another frame builder would view this mistake and understand how meaningless it was. These drips of metal were merely esthetically displeasing. But this made me think. How messed up can something can be before it is too messed up? What

are the parameters for this? At one point if something seems perfect, then maybe it's unnecessarily so. But on the other hand if it is filled with little mistakes, at what point are they're too many, and at what point does the viewer stop trusting the maker?

Often I was very conflicted when working on someone's custom bicycle. I found that I had to execute decisions that didn't make sense. For instance I remember we made a bicycle with a 1 1/8" head tube. The entire bicycle was complete and ready for paint. At the last moment the customer decided that they wanted a 1.5" head tube and to run a different drive train. So we had to take this bicycle that was perfect the way it was, remove the head tube, and replace all the cable guides. Before anything was wrong with it we had to make something wrong with it. By putting more heat into the frame we were jeopardizing its structural integrity. After this ordeal I remember being left with the feeling of absolute pointlessness.

If it was so pointless maybe it was a work of art? Except it wasn't a work of art so there was nothing satisfying in spending that energy. But in an artwork, if something is pointlessly engineered (maybe inefficiently, or it doesn't function professionally) it can become the whole point of the artwork, or the beginning of a new artwork.

Canoeing



This past summer I was at an art residency by a lake. When I arrived there I knew straight away that I wanted to structure my work around this body of water. I wasn't sure how this project would take form. I was really grasping in this work, trying to capture a specific feeling. I knew I wanted to go out on the lake, and create the artwork from there, so I found a canoe. I was intrigued by how blind this urge was. I felt there was something that was disconnecting me from really experiencing the lake, even though I knew that it was nothing special. My first idea was to make it appear as though I was watching a television show of the water. I wanted the video to appear as though I was sitting on a couch in front a television screen. I planned to do this by mounting a 3.5 x 6 foot photograph of my living room, viewed from a couch, onto a board that would be mounted to the center of a canoe. A video camera would be installed behind me, filming the back of my head so it appeared that I was sitting on the couch. I figured out how to attach the screen to the center of the canoe and was almost ready to begin my journey, when the printer at the residency broke, and I couldn't mount the photograph of the living room to the screen.



This was a lucky obstacle. I thought the easiest way around this was to green screen the image in afterwards. But once I got the footage of this green frame around a lake, and my head bobbing within this green space, I could see that this was more interesting than the original idea. I have been trying to be less rigid about my plans and let the work take its own form. I am interested in creating my art with what I have in front of me. This is my way of responding to the urgency within the work. I have learned to not wait until everything is perfect because I realize that this can stand in the way of more interesting decisions. It's important for me to have an initial idea, and decide how I want something to be in my head, but I can't let it stand in the way of something better, and unexpected happening.



Thinking like a hunter

Yesterday in a critique someone made an interesting observation. We were critiquing a sculpture that resembled a hand tool. Someone mentioned they wanted to pick it up. They then became aware that the sculpture was an arrangement made of separate pieces and could not be picked up. This reminded me of something I read in a book, where the author talks about observing something beautiful in nature such as an ice sickle. They then go on to explain their realization that they can never take that beauty with them, because separating it from nature would only diminish its beauty. Like a curious child picking a leaf off a tree, examining it, and meticulously shredding it to pieces. This is the impulse that interests me with in hunting. The hunter's drive to be a part of nature, and connect with the cycle of life, leads them to kill the animal they are fascinated with. To me this displays our human impulse to understand, and dissect the world around us. This impulse is simultaneously destructive and constructive. It's constructive because you learn something from dissecting and examining, but destructive because you make it cease to exist.

Within art I attempt to create structures that can hold or capture this moment between discovering and destroying. I am interested in the hunters urge to touch and take these animals or things in nature for their own. I can relate to this. Like the hunter I want to get

closer to the things I find beautiful, but unlike the hunter I do not want to kill them. I know that I can't own what is being hunted. For me the hunt is driven by the thrill of the meeting. When the animal or subject emerges unexpectedly. But once the animal or subject dies, the feeling that emerges from that interaction leaves. It's similar to these exotic fish in the tropics that have radiant colors that disappear after they are killed. Nothing can recreate the experience of the living thing, and most attempts such as taxidermy fall short. This is also true of my attempt to capture the image within a stereogram. The captured experience of the stereogram is flattened by a screen and instantly reduced from the true experience. I am really interested in trying to create these "live" experiences. When are we really in the place that our body inhabits? There is an anticipation and excitement that comes from waiting for something that makes you feel particularly alive.